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DE RUEHPS #0020/01 0101645
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 101645Z JAN 07
FM USOFFICE PRISTINA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6911
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000020

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EUR/ACE FOR DMAYHEW

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: SCUL KCRM PGOV PINR PREL YI UNMIK EAID PHUM
SOCI
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: 2006 A SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR SERBIAN
ORTHODOX CHURCH RECONSTRUCTION

REF: A. 06 PRISTINA 24

- 1B. 06 PRISTINA 853
- 1C. 06 PRISTINA 663
- 1D. 06 PRISTINA 352
- 1E. 06 PRISTINA 985

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY. In 2006, the Reconstruction Implementation Commission (RIC) completed extensive renovations on seven Serbian Orthodox religious sites damaged or destroyed during the March 2004 riots. Work on an eighth site will continue into early 2007 due to the complexity of the works. The Kosovo government provided most of the funding for the RIC's work. Serbian Orthodox Church leaders have expressed their satisfaction with the work, much of which was carried out by Kosovo Albanians. The RIC plans to reconstruct 18 more sites in 2007, sixteen of which will be funded by the Kosovo government and two by the European Agency for Reconstruction. UNESCO will also undertake reconstruction projects with donor funding. Kosovo's RIC continues to be one of the most successful examples of inter-ethnic cooperation. END SUMMARY.

12. (SBU) The Reconstruction Implementation Commission for Orthodox Religious Sites in Kosovo (RIC) was established in March 2005 to oversee the reconstruction of Orthodox Churches damaged or destroyed in the March 2004 riots. The RIC is chaired by the Council of Europe (COE) and includes representatives from the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC), the Kosovo Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport (MCYS), Serbia's Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments (IPM), and Kosovo's Institute for the Protection of Monuments. Bishop Teodosije Sibalic of Lipljan, based at Decani Monastery, participates as the SOC representative. In 2005, the RIC successfully completed "emergency interventions" on 31 sites, to prevent further deterioration due to exposure to the weather (Ref A). Additional information about the RIC,

including detailed descriptions and photos of each site, is available at www.rickosovo.org.

¶3. (SBU) The RIC's 2006 work program consisted of extensive renovations on eight sites identified as priority sites by the Serbian IPM. On December 20, the RIC announced the successful completion of work at seven of the sites: the Monastery of Saint Joanikije at Devic (Skenderaj/Srbica); Old Church of Saint George (Runovic) in Prizren; the Church of Holy Virgin Ljeviska in Prizren; Saint Elias Church in Vushtrri/Vucitern; Saint Nicholas Church in Pristina; Church of the Presentation of the Holy Virgin Mary in Belo Polje (Peja/Pec); and the church of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin Mary (Gjakova/Djakovica). The RIC extended the deadline for completion of work on an eighth site, the Episcopal Church of St. George in Prizren, into 2007, due to the complexity of the works. New domes on the roof of St. George have already significantly altered Prizren's skyline.

¶4. (SBU) At St. Nicholas Church, works included internal plastering on the church and parish house, repairing the dome, and mounting internal scaffolding on the belfry. Projects at the other sites included roof repairs, internal plastering and drainage, stone cleaning, the repairing of cracks, construction of a retaining wall, electrical installation and other internal and external repairs. According to the RIC, re-roofing at the Ljeviska church was done on an expedited basis because someone stole the lead roof on the previously-damaged church in October 2005. (NOTE: Incidents involving theft and vandalism at cultural heritage sites are ongoing throughout Kosovo (Ref B, Ref C), and hard-line Bishop Artemije, head of the Raska and Prizren diocese, cited this insecurity as his motive for refusing to participate in the reconstruction efforts. END NOTE).

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¶5. (SBU) Fedor Klimtchouk, UNMIK representatives to the MCYS, called the RIC, "an excellent model of effective cooperation," and highlighted the importance of high level engagement and dialogue between the two ministers in Belgrade and Pristina. He mentioned that most of the RIC's 2006 work program was funded by the Kosovo's Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG). During a November 21 press conference, RIC chairperson Emma Carmichael said that those funds totaled 2.3 million euros in 2006, and that the RIC will ask the PISG for an additional 2.9 million euros for the 2007 work program. This will include extensive reconstruction work on another 18 sites and the restoration of damaged frescoes. Of those sites, sixteen are to be funded by the PISG, while the remaining two -- Prizren's Episcopal Residence and Orthodox Seminary -- will be funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR). The Episcopal Residence, burned by rioters in March 2004, is Artemije's official residence. Artemije has lived at Gracanica Monastery since 1999 due to security concerns, and has often used his own status as an internally displaced person (IDP) as an argument to fuel his fiery rhetoric, including his refusal to accept a visit by PM Ceku on Orthodox Easter in April 2006 (Ref D).

¶6. (SBU) Father Sava Janjic told us on December 29 that he is "quite satisfied" with the reconstruction work carried out by the RIC in 2006, calling it a "rare piece of good news" to come out of Kosovo. He said that the work, much of which was carried out by Kosovo Albanians under the supervision of Serb architects from the Serbian IPM, was "very professional" and added that the contracting companies were committed to maintaining high standards. He said that Decani Monastery officials were so impressed with one of the companies (a Kosovo Albanian contractor based in Gjakova/Djakovica) that they have hired the company to do some construction work at Decani Monastery. Sava said that his one complaint was that the 2006 work program started late -- in July -- and said he hopes that the 2007 program will get underway sooner. He said that because the RIC has been so successful under its

current mandate, he would like to see that mandate expanded to include reconstruction of additional sites, beyond those damaged or destroyed in March 2004. However, he pointed out that any such revision of the RIC's mandate would require a new memorandum of understanding (MOU).

¶7. (SBU) Klimtchouk mentioned that in addition to the work carried out by the RIC, UNESCO is moving forward with plans to undertake reconstruction work "on all types" of cultural heritage in Kosovo. He said that in May 2005, donor countries pledged USD 10 million for these efforts (including one million from the USG). He said that in September 2006 UNESCO and UNMIK signed an umbrella MOU establishing the framework for implementation, and added that supplementary MOUs now urgently need to be signed for specific projects. (NOTE: In mid-January, a UNESCO delegation will visit Kosovo to meet with UNMIK and facilitate the supplementary MOU necessary to start USG-funded projects, including work on several Orthodox churches. END NOTE). According to Sava's KiM Info Service, Belgrade's Coordination Center for Kosovo and Metohija (CCK) (Ref E) is separately funding the reconstruction of the Church of St. Sosmas and Damian in Zociste Monastery (Rahovec/Orahovac Municipality); and the Serbian government funded reconstruction works on the Pec Patriarchate (in Peja/Pec) in 2006 worth 15 million dinars (over USD two million).

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT. Kosovo's RIC continues to be an example of multi-ethnic cooperation that is achieving visible results. Quietly but with resolve, Kosovo's Serbs and Albanians are working together to restore an important part of Kosovo's cultural heritage. We will continue to follow and support this process, both to preserve Kosovo's irreplaceable historical/cultural patrimony, as well as to

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encourage Serbs to remain -- and return. END COMMENT.

¶9. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release to Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari.
LASKARIS